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Bell Says He's Decided On Helms Case Action

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Attorney General Griffin B. Bell said yesterday he has made a decision on whether to prosecute former Central Intelligence Agency Director Richard Helms but will keep it secret while seeking President Carter's approval.

Bell said he had discussed the case with Carter "only in a general way" and wanted to give the President more details, including possible security risks that could arise in a prosecution.

The Justice Department has been looking into allegations that Helms lied in testimony before a congressional panel investigating the CIA, and it also checked whether the CIA under Helms' direction tried to subvert the Marxist regime of Chilean President Salvador Allende.

Helms maintained that the CIA had no direct part in Allende's overthrow, but the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded the agency was involved in undermining the Allende government.

Bell conceded he has been under heavy pressure to drop the Helms investigation but "in the job that I have,

you expect to be under some pressure."

He said a decision in the case was likely to be made public "perhaps within two weeks," and that he planned to discuss the matter with a grand jury.

Bell discussed the issue with reporters at the White House. Asked if he had decided whether to prosecute Helms, he said, "Well, I have, I think, reached a decision."

Elaborating on the need to discuss the case with Carter, he said, "I don't have any reason to doubt that he wouldn't concur, but I haven't got it finalized to the point that I would want him to sign off on it."

Bell said concern over exposing national security secrets has delayed a decision.

"Any time you prosecute someone who has been engaged in foreign intelligence, you run some risk," he said. But he said he had enough information to decide whether indictment of Helms would raise a danger of significant national security matters being breached.

Last month, CIA Director Stansfield Turner told a news conference the government might not prosecute Helms because it feared sensitive security matters would become public.